

CASEY AND CRUSOE

By T. Morris Fraser

We were sitting on the verandah in front of the old farmhouse that was the center of Cascade Kennels, when Julie said:

“Look! There’s an animal at the foot of the driveway”.

The driveway was long and straight and ended at a sideroad about five or six hundred feet away. I looked.

“That’s more than an animal.” I said “That’s a dog, and I hope it’s not one of ours.”

It was clearly a dog, and a very unhappy one at that, but fortunately not one of ours, limping on three feet, and obviously very fatigued.

“I’ll get the truck,” I said. “I don’t want to carry the thing up all that way.”

The truck was parked outside. I jumped in and drove down the driveway, stopping a good six feet or more in front of the dog, who weakly wagged his tail as I moved towards him. He was in bad shape, cut, scraped and bruised, hair bedraggled and tangled with twigs and grass, dragging a rear leg as he walked towards me. I didn’t know whether he had been badly abused, or hit by a car, or whatever. I lifted him carefully into the back of the truck and drove back to the house. Julie was waiting for me.

“Oh my God! He’s in a mess”, she said. “We’ll have to take him in and clean him up.”

“We’ll have to do more than that.” I responded. “We’ll have to take him to the vet. I think he’s got a broken leg.”

“O.K.” said Julie, ever practical. “But we should clean him up a bit first,”

I carried him carefully in and laid him on the old kitchen table. Julie untangled his hair and removed the grass and twigs, and then trimmed around the wounds and scratches before dressing them, while I made a make shift wooden splint and bandaged it on his leg to hold it in position. All the while the dog lay placidly, wide awake, and seemingly in gratitude at our attentions.

The vet, of course, was well known to us. She had often attended our dogs for one reason or another. And she wasn't surprised when we brought our new prize in.

"O.K." she said. "You go and sit in the waiting room and leave him here with me. I'll look after him." It was nearly an hour before he came out again, but when he did he was a different dog. His wounds were all dressed, and he wore a special aluminum splint that held the leg in proper position, with a loop around his body and a leather strap to adjust it. Not only that, but he seemed to have lost a lot of his fatigue or stress, and while occasionally looking curiously at his splint, was clearly much happier than he was when we first saw him

"He can walk with that," she said, and I think it should be O.K. to remove it in about 6 weeks or so. And do you know you've got a poodle there, probably of show stock?"

"No! We certainly didn't," I said, "and he sure doesn't look like these tarty dressed up poodles you see in the dog shows. But he has a lovely temperament despite his injuries. And thank you very much for your help."

We left, and I placed him on the front seat beside Julie.

"Well, what are we going to do now?" she asked, ruefully.

"I don't know," I said, "but I suppose we'll have to keep him. And we'll have to try and find out who owns him."

So we took him home, gave him some food which he ate ravenously, settled him on a cushion, and then called the radio stations, and put a small ad in the local newspaper.

"Well, we've done our duty," I said, "What now? I suppose we'll have to keep him here at least until his leg heals."

"Well, it's not as though we didn't have other dogs," said Julie. "I suppose we have to keep him in the house for now, but you know, we can't keep on calling him Dog. We'll have to give him a name. We tossed around one name after another but couldn't find an appropriate one until I said:

"I know, we'll call him Crusoe. He was abandoned but he found refuge here."

And Crusoe he became, and continued in the house for another few weeks , peaceful and happy, going out to do his business, although with some difficulty because of the splint. But he never made a fuss. By now we had realized that in spite of our attempts no one was going to claim him, so whether we wanted him or not we had a responsibility for him.

And then one day Julie said:

“You know, there’s something funny about Crusoe. He doesn’t seem to know anything you say. You speak to him and he pays no attention. You call his name and he doesn’t respond. You know something, I think he’s deaf. Maybe when he was injured or abused it damaged his hearing. I really think he’s deaf, and I think he’s well enough that we should consider transferring him into the kennels, to be with other dogs, Maybe he needs their company. After all, even the real Crusoe had a Man Friday”.

“A Man Friday” I said. “Oh, I can give him a Man Friday. We’ll put him in the kennel with Casey. It’s a double kennel, and their personalities may do each other good.”

And so, a few days later, Crusoe was introduced to Casey. Casey, of course was delighted. After the ritual exchange of sniffing, Casey’s tail began to wag. He jumped up and down, barking, nuzzled Crusoe, tried to get him to play, but Crusoe was having none of it. He found his bed which we had put in earlier, sat down and nonchalantly watched Casey’s antics, with obviously no intention of getting involved with them, which was just as well, since he still had his splint on.

A day or two later, after the dogs had settled in, I thought it was about time I took Crusoe out to give him some training. He followed me out willingly, leaving a chagrined Casey to mope in the kennel. Outside the kennel was a big grassy yard. I sat him down and walked away about a dozen or so feet, and called “Crusoe! Come.” As usual he took no notice. And then a thought struck me. I don’t know why I hadn’t thought of it before. Crusoe was still sitting and I was still a dozen feet away. I called “Crusoe! Attention! Vien!” Crusoe climbed to his feet and lazily began to walk towards me. I called again “Crusoe! Vite! Vite! ici! “ and pointed to my feet.

Crusoe picked his pace and came to my feet. "Asseyez-vous" I said more politely. Crusoe sat, looking up at me. I patted his head. "Bon chien," I said, and dashed into the house. "Julie!" I yelled. "Crusoe is not deaf, he speaks French, come out and see!"

"What do you mean he speaks French?", said Julie.

"Well, he understands it anyway," I said. "Come and see.

We went out to the yard. Crusoe was still there, wandering around but not quite so boisterous as usual.

"Call him!" I said. "Not much point. He doesn't come", she replied,

"Call him anyway I went on."

"Crusoe!, she called. "Come!" Crusoe looked up briefly and went on with his wanderings.

"See! What's the point," said Julie.

"O.K. call him in French," I said.

I don't remember all that much French, " she said

"Never mind, It'll come back to you." I went on, " Just say 'Vien! Vien! Crusoe', and see what happens."

Julie looked at me doubtfully.

"O.K. I'll try." She looked at Crusoe as he wandered around the yard. "Crusoe!, she yelled.

"Vien! Vien!"

Crusoe stopped, looked at her and then came racing toward her, tail wagging .

"Good dog," she said, "I mean bon chien!". Crusoe continued to prance, wagging his tail.

We put the leash on him and went back to the kennel. Casey was delighted, and so were we.

"Well, that puts a different slant on things," said Julie. "What do we do now?"

"Well, I guess we have to speak to Crusoe in French, if we can, and speak to Casey in English," I said, hopefully. And that we did.

We worked on our French together, and every day, at different times each of us would go into the kennel and speak to the dogs, one in French and the other in English. Crusoe was clearly becoming much more outgoing, and Casey was pleased just to have some attention, and our French improved a lot.

So, as communication also improved I thought I would take Crusoe out and give him some of the training he missed when we thought he was deaf. I took Casey out as well, but kept him on the leash beside me in case he would gleefully interrupt the training of Crusoe. He wasn't very happy about that, but obviously was interested in what was happening to his buddy. Of course, when I let him off the leash he took off in his normal flamboyant style, and I had some difficulty in getting him back in, although he had settled down to the extent I had no more need to call on Jingle to help. The training went on intensively for about three months. By this time I began to think that Crusoe could make a good showing in obedience trials, and Casey was quite happy to sit by my side, although he would still take off in joy when I let him off the leash and I still had a lot of trouble getting him to come to me. And then I had another Great Thought but I hesitated to put it into effect until the time seemed right. And I also wanted to do it in the presence of Julie, and hopefully give her a great surprise. When the right time seemed to be imminent I went into the house and told her to come outside, I had something to show her. Then I brought Casey out of the kennel into the yard on his leash. Julie looked at me doubtfully. I said to her: "Watch this!"

I let Casey off his leash. He stood in surprise for a moment. And then took off like a flash, racing round the yard just as he used to do. I said to Julie, "Call him."

"But he doesn't come," she said.

"Call him, anyway, call him in French."

"But he doesn't understand French," she expostulated.

"Try him, anyway," I said. "just try it." She looked at me askance, and turned back to look at Casey racing round the yard.

"Casey!" she called, "Casey, Attention! Vien! Vien ici!. Casey stopped, looked at her in what might have been amazement, and raced over to her and sat at her feet. Julie looked at Casey in wonder. "That's impossible," she said. "No it's not", I responded. "Casey is not just the wild beautiful dumb thing we thought he was. He can learn, but not how we thought he should.

Most dogs learn new behaviors by repetition and reward, and maybe Casey can learn that way too. But this time he learned just by watching and learning. He's not dumb, he's very smart." Julie looked at him as he still gazed up at her. She shook her head gently and then bent down and put her arms round his neck.

"Oh Casey!" she said, "mon tres bon chien. Tu es merveilleux, tu es magnifique, et tu es plus beaux que Crusoe, et je t'aime. I don't know if Casey understood a word of what she was saying, but he wagged his tail. He knew where it was coming from. It was coming from love.